

BOOK REVIEWS



DOROTHEA LYNDE DIX. 1802-1887.

By no means a new book is Francis Tiffany's "Life of Dorothea Lynde Dix," yet I venture to say there are many of us who know too little of the woman, the story of whose splendid achievements forms, under Mr. Tiffany's hand, a tale to interest every earnest soul who rejoices in successful effort to help the helpless. Here are lessons for all, from the one whose only opportunity is to help the lame dog over the stile, to the legislators who stand guard over the institutions of our land in providential watchfulness. Finding himself swamped in a huge and chaotic correspondence which Miss Dix never meant to go into publication, Mr. Tiffany feels he can allow all of it to go by and let the actual existing monuments of her untiring zeal, her unflagging patience, speak for themselves—and speak they do to the very hearts of his readers as he holds up, with splendid effect, picture after picture for us to look at and to learn from.

One catches the spirit of the biographer, who claims for his own country all the glory one naturally looks for far back in remote years and distant countries,—St. Theresa of Spain, he says, or Santa Chiara of Assisi. Their amazing works, their wonderful lives, are paralleled by this gentle New England old maid of our own time, or so near to it that we may claim her. One passes, not without pity, the early years of a life hemmed in by severest discipline: the child who passionately throws away her hateful task of binding and sewing ranting tracts, and accepts in preference to her father's disordered household the stern order of her grandmother; the young school-mistress at fourteen, her sleeves lengthened and her hair done grown up—to command the respect of her pupils, of which she was so sensitive; even the time when she reaches the acme of her early ambition, and, as mistress of her own boarding-school, tries to bring the varying standard of her average pupils to the level of her own character. Even here, her desire gained, she is heart hungry—all the influences of the social condition of her time tend to lead only to starvation pastures. Her health gives way, and at thirty-four years of age comes one of those breaking-up times in life that seems like the end of all things, while it is in reality the starting-point of new, vigorous growth. Two years of life in England, by no means idle, and she is back in her native land, fairly well and strong. A small source of revenue formed partly by her own savings and partly from a legacy from her grandmother makes it possible for her to look about her and apply her energies where they will find scope. She enters an open door by the veriest chance,—sees somewhat amiss in the East Cambridge House of Correction, and pursues her investigations to the jail of the city. The sight of the shivering misery of the few insane inmates sets her thinking. She procures a fire for these, but the thought has entered her mind—she will see how others fare. Note-book in hand, she starts forth and begins an investigation of prisons, almshouses, houses of detention of whatever character they may be,—wherever in the State of Massachusetts there were to be found insane or helpless deficient-minded beings, either under care of hired or State keepers, or kept under restraint by friends and relatives. Two years of hard and patient labor in Massachusetts brought her before the Legislature with a "memorial" setting forth abuses almost incredible in num-

ber and magnitude. She is immediately assailed by the great pack of traders in human misery, keepers, minders, nurses; a great cry of adverse criticism arises; there is stone-throwing and dust-raising. Miss Dix stands firm; every charge is substantiated and sworn to by witnesses. She has done her work so that her foes find it hard to make any headway against it, and, moreover, a great army of friends and sympathizers rises up and comes flocking to her support, rejoicing in the prospect of casting out of the State the reproach of having their "insane confined in cages, cellars, closets, pens; chained, naked, beaten, lashed into obedience." The bill for "immediate relief" is carried by a large majority. But no reaction follows this glorious success.

Rhode Island is next attacked; there she but repeats the tale of Massachusetts, and so through each State as she takes it up—asylums built, conditions for the insane miraculously changed. She sets her hand to a larger scheme.

There is no story in fiction more thrilling than that of Miss Dix's twelve-million-acre land bill, the sale of public lands for the benefit of the insane, blind, deaf, and dumb. Summer heat and winter cold she braved, electioneering, working, praying, hoping, and is justified by her success, for her bill passed in the Senate but was vetoed by the President. Mr. Tiffany does not explain satisfactorily, to one reader at least, the arbitrary action of the President in vetoing the bill of his Senate.

To recover from this blow Miss Dix made her second journey across the Atlantic, where we find her ordering ministers of State as lackeys, moving the Queen of England by proxy, and the Pope of Rome by personal interview, calling to the mightiest in every land to look to the feeble, the helpless. The concessions made by these conservative old-world peoples of privileges and castes she is perfectly oblivious to.

But once again back in America. When the poor, unshaven, shabby host of a road-house in Texas refuses with emotion expressed in expletives to take payment for her dinner, and asks only that he and his children may shake her hand, tears come to her eyes at the "kindness of everybody."

It is with the kindest, gentlest of touches that Mr. Tiffany passes over her career as chief executive of nursing during the Civil War. We follow his example and disdain detraction, yet it seems only natural and right that one whose whole life was spent in making the crooked straight, the rough places plain, bringing order out of chaos, should be out of her proper element in serving in any capacity the great misery and disorder-making machine that war must ever be.

But read the book. No rapid skimming flight over the events it chronicles begins to give any adequate idea of the far-reaching, splendid success attained by the subject of it, who is at once the gentlest and most powerful lady in the land.

M. E. C.

THE second edition of Miss Kimber's well-known "Text-Book on Anatomy and Physiology for Nurses" has appeared. This book, which has become a classic among nurses' text-books, and which is in wide and general use, is too well known to need a full review. The material has been recast, and in certain chapters largely rewritten, Dr. Percy M. Dawson, of the Johns Hopkins University, having assisted in the whole revision, and especially in the chapter on the nervous system, so extensively that Miss Kimber in her preface says she would have been glad to place his name with hers on the title-page. A number of new drawings have been made specially for this edition, including ten original ones by Dr. Dawson.